



United States Department of Agriculture

# **IOWA** **CURRENT** **DEVELOPMENTS**

**February/March 2017**

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NATURAL RESOURCES  
CONSERVATION SERVICE  
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# a **Message** from the **State Conservationist**



Kurt Simon,  
State Conservationist

## **Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey: Making Improvements**

We received Iowa's 2016 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey results in December. A random sample of 94 Iowa NRCS employees received an invitation to participate in the annual survey—69 percent responded.

The survey asks groups of questions about job satisfaction, leadership performance, work culture and other criteria.

Employee engagement is a key measurement determined by the survey. As defined by the US Office of Personal Management, this measurement reflects an employee's sense of purpose that is evident in their display of dedication, persistence and effort in their work or overall attachment to their organization and its mission. I'm pleased to share Iowa's Employee

Engagement Index score was 71% in 2016.

I was especially interested in how Iowa scored on the following statement: "I believe the results of the survey will be used to make the agency a better place to work." Our score improved 10 percentage points this past year, and I am hopeful that the 2017 survey will indicate additional growth in this question.

About a year ago, I started my trip around the state to conduct listening sessions in every sub-area. Since then, we have identified areas to improve and have been working to achieve those improvements one-by-one. On page 4, I will go into more detail on some of these accomplishments and highlight what improvements are planned for the future.

## **IOWA CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS**

*Current Developments* is a product of the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service in Des Moines, Iowa, published bimonthly by the Iowa NRCS Public Affairs Staff in cooperation with NRCS and partner agency employees from across the state.

### **CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS STORIES AND PHOTOS**

Please submit your Current Developments story ideas and photos to State Public Affairs Specialist Laura Crowell at [laura.crowell@ia.usda.gov](mailto:laura.crowell@ia.usda.gov). Past issues can be found at [www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/ia/people/employees/?cid=nrcs142p2\\_008273](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/ia/people/employees/?cid=nrcs142p2_008273)



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## LISTENING SESSION ACTION ITEMS: PROGRESS REPORT—KURT SIMON



Every week the Leadership team discusses the action items developed as a result of the input gathered last winter and spring during my sub-area listening sessions. We are nearly through our first round of improvements, so I wanted to provide you an update. The team developed 60 actions grouped into four main categories:

- Conservation Planning
- Communication
- Training
- Office Structure and Staffing

Following are a few highlighted changes we have implemented, or that are nearly complete. Some are simple, and others are complex. But each are intended to make helpful improvements.

### **Sharing Leadership Team Minutes**

One of the very first items I implemented was distributing minutes from our weekly Monday LT meetings. With Shelly Grimmus' help, we are improving communication by making sure every NRCS and partner employee has access to the same information at the same time.



### **Consolidating Job Sheets, Specs and Standards**

To help ensure access to the most current technical information and reduce confusion and rework, technical staff relocated all job sheets, specs and standards to Section IV of the Field Office Technical Guide.

### **Providing Consistent Direction on Conservation Planning**

Many staff shared that conservation planning requirements varied between areas. This created confusion and sometimes rework—wasting valuable staff time. To ensure all technical staff have clear expectations on what constitutes a conservation plan and the tools planners must use, technical staff is developing an on-line conservation portal. This tool will include a sample conservation plan and links to all the tools used during the conservation planning process, as well as samples of how to use the tools. This will be a watershed change in how Iowa completes conservation planning and improve many of the challenges we face.



### **Eliminating Obsolete Policy**

Each Division Lead is reviewing all directives to make sure they are still current and relative. Any obsolete directive will be canceled and removed from our archives. Here's a sampling of the outdated instructions we have canceled: 440-381, 440-383, 440-384, 440-386, 440-391, 440-393, 440-394 and 440-395.

While I think we've made a good start, the Leadership Team realizes there are more opportunities for us to improve. I plan to continue to provide updates as we accomplish additional changes.



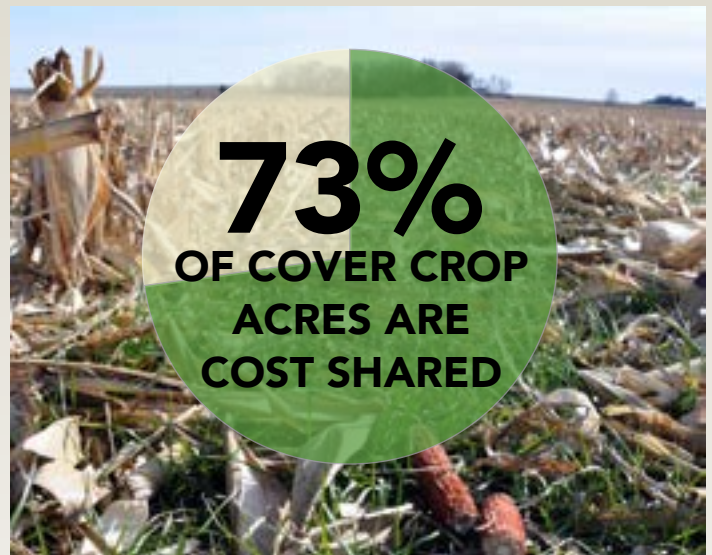
## COVER CROPS GROWING: DESPITE SHRINKING PROFIT MARGINS

According to the newly released Iowa Learning Farms (ILF) 2016 Field Day Evaluation Report, Iowa cover crop acres grew by approximately 32 percent since last year to 623,700 acres. While the positive growth with shrinking profit margins is encouraging, the rate of growth 3% slower than the growth measured the year before.

ILF sponsored 30 conservation field days and workshops in 2016 on cover crops, strip-tillage, saturated buffers, prairie strips and more. These events drew an attendance of 1,510 people (27 percent female), primarily farmers and landowners (89%).

According to the report, growth in cover crop acres came from both first time and experienced users. The majority of respondents (69%) started seeding cover crops at least three years ago and have an average of five years of experience with cover crops.

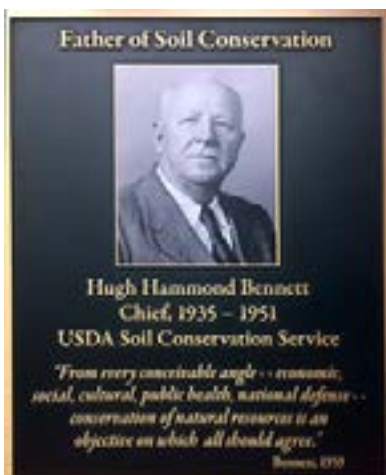
As experience with cover crops increased, concerns about yield impacts and implementation knowledge decreased. This is consistent with findings from the longest running on-farm cover crop research and demonstration project in the state of Iowa. After eight years, a properly managed cereal rye cover crop had little-to-no negative effect on corn and soybean yield and actually increased soybean yield in 7 site-years



and corn yield in 2 site-years.

Cost was identified as the biggest barrier to cover crop adoption for the third straight year. Cost share continued to be a driver as approximately 61 percent of cover crop farmers reported using cost share, representing 73% of the overall reported cover crops acres (up 3% from 2015). Cost share was used to plant 82% of the acres for farmers who reported cover crop usage for three years.

-From Iowa Learning Farms



## SPECIAL DEDICATION: TO OUR FIRST CHIEF

On January 12, 2017, the new NRCS Hugh Hammond Bennett Conference Room was dedicated in the USDA South Building in Washington, D.C. This room is the only known NRCS space dedicated to the agency's first chief, Dr. Hugh Hammond Bennett.

Dr. Bennett was the first chief of the U.S. Department of Interior, Soil Erosion Service—established in 1933 in direct response to the Dust Bowl of the Central Plains. In 1935, he became chief of the U.S. Department

of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service (now NRCS).

A new bronze plaque, designed and professionally produced, will hang in the conference room and features one of Dr. Bennett's many timeless quotes. In 1959, he said, "From every conceivable angle—economic, social, cultural, public health, national defense—conservation of natural resources is an objective on which all should agree."

-Submitted by Becky Scott, A2 AMA

## LEADERS IN CONSERVATION: ACHIEVING MORE TOGETHER

GRAPEVINE, TEXAS- On March 17 and 18, four Iowa NRCS employees participated in the **Leaders in Conservation** training conference coordinated by the National Organization of Professional Hispanic NRCS Employees (NOPHNRCSE), the Asian Pacific Islander Organization (APIO) and the National Organization of Professional Woman (WiN).

Overall, 175 employees were registered from 30 state. In addition, 21 State Conservationists, two Regional Conservationists and four other National Leadership members attended the meeting and served an active role in the agenda. These leaders shared their career paths and answered employee questions.

Kelly Oliver, who received a WiN conference scholarship for professional development, said that "it was heartwarming to see many national leaders at the conference, mingling with the staff and answering questions".

As you look for opportunities for professional development, professional organizations are



Kelly Oliver



Left to Right: Nick Vira (APIO President), Karri Honaker (WiN President), Anand Hase (SC, Carroll Co. Iowa), Jaia Fischer (ASTC-M&S Iowa), Luis Cruz-Arroyo (ASTC-FO Iowa) and Astrid Martinez (NOPHNRCSE President).

a great resource for technical and soft skills that you may not be able to access directly through NRCS. This unique platform gave employees the opportunity for training, mentorship and networking with staff from different states and backgrounds.

If you would like more information on these organizations, visit [www.winnrcs.org](http://www.winnrcs.org), [www.apio.org](http://www.apio.org) and [www.nophnrcse.org](http://www.nophnrcse.org).

Submitted by Luis A. Cruz-Arroyo, Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations (A1)



Pictured Left to right: Carolyn Schwartz, Tom Gust and Kevin Kordick.

## CELEBRATING MILESTONES: IN THE BOONE/GREEN MU

Three employees in the Boone/Green Management Unit were recently recognized for their years of federal service.

- Technician Carolyn Schwartz: 20 years
- District Conservationist Kevin Kordick: 25 years
- Technician Tom Gust: 35 years

Congratulations on your individual achievements and your collective **80 years** of service to NRCS!

Submitted by William Peek, farm bill specialist, Ft. Dodge Area Office.



## IN MEMORIAM: IOWA'S FIRST WOMAN COMMISSIONER



Marvel Clement

Iowa's first woman soil and water conservation commissioner, Marvel M. Clement of Newton, died Jan. 21. She was 99.

Clement was born July 9, 1917, near Newton. She graduated from Newton Senior High School and attended Normal

Training and taught in area country schools.

On June 22, 1937, Marvel was united in marriage with Carl Lind Clement in rural Newton. Clement was a loving wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother and great-great grandmother. She was a member of the Sugar Grove Grange and Metz Community Church, where she taught Sunday school.

She is survived by her daughter, Caroline (Ed) Rasmussen of Newton; a sister, Marjorie Lane of Newton; her five grandchildren; six great-grandchildren; and two great-great-grandchildren; half-brother, Robert (Judy) Hitchler; and many friends.

*-Submitted by Conservation Districts of Iowa*



## ARE YOU EXPECTING? KNOW YOUR LEAVE OPTIONS

The Federal Women's Program (FWP) recently published a comprehensive maternity leave fact sheet called "What to Expect When You are Requesting Leave & Returning to Work". You can download a copy of the fact sheet from this link:

[Maternity Leave Fact Sheet](#)

The fact sheet explains the following topics:

- requesting leave
- types of leave
- Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA)
- returning to work

For additional information regarding benefits, contact Carolyn Christian or your AMA.

SAVE THE DATE:  
**August 25**

## NRCS CONSERVATION CLASSIC GOLF TOURNAMENT

Lincoln Valley Golf Course ([www.lincolnvalleygolf.com](http://www.lincolnvalleygolf.com))  
State Center, Iowa  
2-Person, Best Shot  
More Info Coming Soon!



## BACK IN THE DAY



*Frank Mendell, State Conservationist,  
Iowa Soil Conservation Service*

### Harmony Watershed PL-566 Project

This photo is taken from a column submitted by State Conservationist Frank Mendell for the Harmony Watershed "Souvenir Issue". Harmony, located in Harrison County, was the first Iowa watershed to apply for PL-566 assistance and begin construction.

In his article Mendell says, "The Harmony Watershed is an excellent example of what can be done to maintain and improve the productivity of the soil, reduce flood damages, and will, in my opinion, do much to help others recognize the great benefits that can come from the watershed program."

Do you have a photo for Back in the Day? Please send it to Laura Crowell at 210 Walnut Street, RM 693 Neal Smith Federal Building, Des Moines, IA, 50309 or [laura.crowell@ia.usda.gov](mailto:laura.crowell@ia.usda.gov).

*Submitted by Margaret Henderson, A4 AMA.*

## FEB 14 WORKSHOP: I <HEART> SOIL HEALTH

NRCS and the Soil and Water Conservation Districts from Jones, Jackson, Linn, Dubuque and Delaware counties partnered with Iowa Corn Growers Association, Soil Health Partnership, Iowa State University and local businesses to host a Soil Health Workshop at the Jones County Fairgrounds on Feb. 14.

Nearly 120 farmers, agronomists and partners attended the workshop which featured the principles of soil health, cover crops and cover crop management, and the economics of managing for soil health.

Speakers included NRCS Regional Soil Health Specialist Doug Peterson, Practical Farmers of Iowa's Sarah Carlson, Dr. David Muth from Ag Solver and Virgil Schmitt from Iowa State University. The workshop also featured a panel of local farmers who discussed why they believe in the principles of soil health and how they put those principles to work on their land.

*-Submitted by District Conservationist Gabe Garbarino,  
Manchester FO*



TOP: Nearly 120 attended a Feb. 14 Soil Health Workshop in Jones County. BOTTOM: Soil Health Specialist Doug Peterson pours water in a soil health demonstration.





## Conservation Inspiration: Selah-Water from Stone



Nearly 50 years ago David Bamberger went public with Church's Chicken and used the capital to purchase 5,500 acres of overgrazed land that was considered some of the poorest acreage in the Texas Hill Country.

He devoted the rest of his life to restoring it. David cleared overgrown woody vegetation, allowed native grasses to grow, and literally created Water from Stone.

The grasses soaked in rains, took moisture into the porous rock below, and filled hillside aquifers instead of running off. There was only one spring when he bought the place, now there are eleven.

There were only 48 species of birds on the first bird count, in 2014 they counted 238 species. His example of land stewardship has been replicated across the region and he's considered a visionary in land management and water conservation.

Be inspired by this eight-minute video featuring the story of Bamberger's ranch, he calls Selah.

<https://vimeo.com/158492815>

## HR CONTACTS:

### Retirement questions?

Please contact Assistant State Conservationist for Management and Strategy Jaia Fischer at [jaia.fischer@ia.usda.gov](mailto:jaia.fischer@ia.usda.gov) or 515-323-2225.

### Other HR questions?

Please contact Management Analyst Carolyn Christian at [carolyn.christian@ia.usda.gov](mailto:carolyn.christian@ia.usda.gov) or 515-323-2619.

## FLOOD SAFETY TIPS:

Floods are the most common and costly natural disaster in the United States. Here are some things to keep in mind as the spring flood season draws near.



Never drive or walk through flooded streets. It only takes six inches of moving water to sweep a person off their feet (and not in the romantic way) and 12 inches to move a car. Remember, if a street is flooded, **Turn Around; Don't Drown.**

Floods are expensive. A few inches of water in a 1,000-square foot home could cost more than \$10,000 in repairs and replacement of personal possessions. Visits FEMA's data visualization website to learn more about the costs and impacts of floods in Iowa.

Most insurance does not cover flood damage. Only flood insurance will cover the damage from floods. Talk with your family and make an emergency plan for you and your pets. No matter the disaster, it's always a good idea to have emergency supplies ready at home, at work, and in the car.

You can learn more about the dangers of flooding and find information about flood insurance at [Ready.gov/floods](http://Ready.gov/floods) and [Floodsmart.gov](http://Floodsmart.gov).

## WEX CARD SKIMMING: AVOIDING GAS PUMP FRAUD

Compromised WEX cards are on the rise. GSA Fleet is averaging about 160 compromised cards per month now. This is a 300% increase from 6 months ago. It does not show any signs of slowing down and is becoming a significant issue for many fleets in the US. Gas stations are exempt till 2018 to switch to EMV (chip and PIN) technology and it is projected that skimming devices at gas stations will rise significantly over the next couple of years. What can you do to protect yourself?

### Tips for consumers

Given the near-invisibility of the devices, it might not be possible to totally avoid a skimming scam. Still, consumers can take several steps to protect their cards at fueling stations. Among the options:

- Pay inside, with cash or a credit card, rather than at the pump. Chances are good that thieves have not entered the physical building to tamper with the pump.
- Be suspicious if the gas pump has a broken security seal, or the word "void" appears on it. These are part of a voluntary program by the industry to thwart gas pump tampering.
- Choose pumps closest to the physical building, not the ones hidden around the corner.



- Use a credit card, not debit card, when you pay. If a credit card number is skimmed, you're playing with the bank's money and protected by the card's zero-liability policy. A stolen debit card number could yield far worse damage. "If a debit card gets compromised, and they have your PIN, you've just given someone access to your cash," says Velasquez of the Identity Theft Resource Center.
- Pay attention when fueling and if it feels weird, don't do it. Sometimes, thieves also swap out the card readers attached to the skimmers. In those cases, they can deliver an unusual feeling to the inserted card—it may stick or otherwise feel not quite right. If that happens, cancel the transaction and pay inside.

Excerpt from: <http://www.creditcards.com/credit-card-news/year-of-gas-station-skimmer-1282.php>

SAVE  
~the~  
DATE

Please join us for **Diversity Day 2017, Tuesday, April 4, 2017** at 10:00 am. Speaker Diane Finnerty, Assistant Provost for Faculty at the University of Iowa, will give a presentation titled, "Exploring the Influence of Unconscious Bias in Our Work and Lives: The Research, The Impact, and Strategies to Override."

The individual and group 2017 Civil Rights/EEO Achievement Award winners will be recognized as well.

The presentation will be held via Skype: <https://meet.usda.gov/amanda.j.hartman/04D3L6J0>. Offices are encouraged to watch as a group because there are limited lines available.

For audio please dial:  
Telephone Number - 1-800-260-0702  
Access Code - 420365





## OUTREACH RESOURCES

Exhibiting at your county fair this summer? Not sure what to include in your booth or what resources are available? Here are some resources that can help.

### State Office Displays and Materials

The State Office offers both pull-up banner displays and table top pop-up displays. You can view the available displays at [https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/ia/people/employees/?cid=nrcs142p2\\_008233](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/ia/people/employees/?cid=nrcs142p2_008233).

Some of the display topics include:

- Conservation Choices
- Conservation Choices for Water Quality
- Conservation Choices for Soil Health
- Cover Crops
- Residue Matters
- No-till/Strip-till

There are also a wide variety of brochures and other outreach materials for farmers, homeowners and children available from the State Office. You can view a list of brochures here: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/ia/newsroom/factsheets/>.

Specialty outreach items are also available. These include:



Pollinator seed packets



Whobuddies Comics & Trading Cards



Cover Crops Coasters

To request any of the State Office materials, please email Tara Kinyon-Anderson.

### National Office Displays and Materials

The National Distribution Center also offers displays and brochures—free for field office use. You can view brochures through this public website:

<https://nrcspad.sc.egov.usda.gov/DistributionCenter/>

Employees with eAuth access can view the available national office exhibits through this website:

[https://ems-team.usda.gov/sites/NRCS\\_DeputyChief/lpad/pa/distribution-center/National%20NRCS%20Exhibits/Forms/AllItems.aspx](https://ems-team.usda.gov/sites/NRCS_DeputyChief/lpad/pa/distribution-center/National%20NRCS%20Exhibits/Forms/AllItems.aspx).



SOIL AND WATER  
CONSERVATION WEEK  
SUNDAY, APRIL 30 TO  
SUNDAY, MAY 7, 2017

## Changes In IOWA NRCS PERSONNEL

NAME	TITLE	NATURE OF ACTION	EFFECTIVE DATE	LOCATION
Foreman, Laurel	Hydrologist	Vol. Retirement	12/31/16	Des Moines
Moore, Tony	District Conservationist	Vol. Retirement	12/31/16	Mason City
Hillmer, Gary	District Conservationist	Vol. Retirement	1/13/17	Iowa Falls MU
Hoeft, Kurt	District Conservationist	Vol. Retirement	1/13/17	Cresco MU
Van Laere, Bruce	District Conservationist	Vol. Retirement	1/1/3/17	DeWitt MU
Vogel, John	Soil Conservationist	Vol. Retirement	1/13/17	LeMars MU
Cruz-Arroya, Luis	Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations	Promotion	1/8/17	Sioux City AO
Gatlin, Cynthia	Civil Engineering Tech	Promotion	1/8/17	Farfield Engineering Office
Frohling, Wyatt	Soil Conservation Tech	Resignation	1/11/17	Guthrie Center
Yemer, Abel	Civil Engineering Tech	Promotion	1/22/17	Atlantic Engineering Office
Broders, Kimberly	Administrative Specialist	Promotion	1/22/17	Des Moines
Debolt, Adam	Soil Conservationist	Promotion	1/22/17	Rock Rapids
Fisher, Jaia	Assistant State Conservationist for Management and Strategy	Promotion	1/22/17	Des Moines
German, Michelle	Resource Conservationist	Promotion	1/22/17	West Union
Mullen, Thomas	Soil Conservationist	Promotion	1/22/17	Marion
Schott, Kaitlin	Soil Conservationist Tech	Promotion	1/22/17	Osceola
Shelman, Nathan	Soil Conservationist	Promotion	1/22/17	Donnellson
Bultman, James	Soil Conservationist	Promotion	2/5/17	Corydon MU
Hase, Anand	Soil Conservationist	Promotion	2/5/17	Carroll
Adam, Eric	Soil Conservationist	Promotion	2/19/17	Williamsburg
Brosan, Timothy	Soil Conservationist	Promotion	2/19/17	Sergeant Bluff
Frana, Matthew	Soil Conservationist	Promotion	2/19/17	Cresco MU
Lowe, Stacie	Soil Conservationist	Promotion	2/19/17	Iowa City
Munden, Giles	Soil Conservationist	Promotion	2/19/17	Corydon MU
Sellers, Laurel	Soil Conservationist	Promotion	2/19/17	Greenfield
Smith, Gareth	Soil Conservation Tech	Promotion	2/19/17	Corydon MU
Swales, Jacobine	Soil Conservationist	Promotion	2/19/17	Dewitt MU
Yule, Katie	Soil Conservationist	Promotion	2/19/17	Charles City MU
Justiniano-Velez, Erika	Ag Engineer	Reassignment	2/19/17	State Engineering



## Changes In IDALS-DSC PERSONNEL

NAME	TITLE	NATURE OF ACTION	EFFECTIVE DATE	LOCATION
Bruun, Tracy	Administrative Asst. to the Director	Promotion	3/10/17	Central Office

**Tracy Bruun Contact Information:** [tracy.bruun@iowaagriculture.gov](mailto:tracy.bruun@iowaagriculture.gov); 515-281-5851



**Title:** Area Engineer, Area 4, Atlantic, Iowa.

**College Education:** Iowa State University, 1980-84, BS - Agricultural Engineering in Dec 1984

**Younger Years:** Jeff grew up on a farm north of Exira in Audubon County, Iowa. His dad tried sheep, dairy, and stock cows before settling on hogs. They had 240 acres of corn, soybeans, and some pasture. Jeff was active in 4H and FFA earning his Iowa Farmer degree and winning the 1982 FFA Conservation Project award for the State of Iowa.

**Conservation Career:** Jeff began his career as a student trainee for five summers from 1980 to 1984 stationed in Audubon twice, Guthrie Center, Creston, and Sioux City. He worked at the Sioux City Area Office from 1985 to 1987 as an engineer in training, then took a Project Engineer job for PL-566 watershed projects in the Council Bluffs Area Office. He was promoted to Area Engineer in 1991 when Norm Koester left Iowa to work for NRCS in Nebraska. The Area 4 Area Office moved to Atlantic in 1984 and he has worked there for the past 23 years. He plans to retire on July 31, 2017 after a 36 year career with NRCS.

**NRCS Goals:** Jeff spent his career providing engineering assistance to treat resource concerns surrounding erosion and feedlot runoff in rural Iowa. Each project provided unique challenges to help save our soil. He has assisted on hundreds of ponds, grade stabilization structures, waterways, terraces, feedlot projects, etc.

He recently announced he will retire on July 31 after 36 years of federal service. He has accepted a job offer from Snyder and Associates in Atlantic Office as a Senior Engineer. He will start his new position on September 1.

**In His Free Time:** Jeff coached youth sports when his children were younger and has been working on updating and remodeling a 1908 farmhouse on 4 acres in Cass County, Iowa. He enjoys carpentry and woodworking as well as watching ISU basketball.

**Family:** He and his wife Teresa have been married 31 years. They have five children: sons, Adam (29), Nick (26), Brandon (25) and daughters, Morgan (20), and Kaylee (18).



Jeff Godwin